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PENNSYLVANIA BEGINNINGS

IN THE

COLONY OF NEW SWEDEN

Remarks By

HONORABLE C. HALE SIPE, LITT. D.

Before the Pennsylvania Senate

April 13, 1937



THE PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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FOREWORD

In accordance with specific enactments of the General Assembly, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania will celebrate in 1938 the 300th Anniversary of the first white settlements within its borders. April 8, 1938, has been designated as a legal holiday, "Forefathers Day," at which time the principal celebration will be conducted.

Strangely enough, Pennsylvanians know very little of the early founding of the Commonwealth and of the history of New Sweden. As a contribution toward remedying this situation, the Pennsylvania Historical Commission is pleased to reprint the remarks of the Honorable C. Hale Sipe, delivered in the Pennsylvania Senate, April 13, 1937. An authority on the history of Pennsylvania, Senator Sipe has presented in moving terms the cause of New Sweden.



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REMARKS OF SENATOR C. HALE SIPE OF THE 41ST DISTRICT,
BUTLER AND ARMSTRONG COUNTIES, UPON INTRODUCING
A RESOLUTION OF SENATOR STIEFEL AND HIMSELF IN
THE STATE SENATE OF PENNSYLVANIA ON APRIL 13TH,
1937, CALLING FOR THE INSERTION OF A CHAPTER ON THE
COLONY OF NEW SWEDEN IN THE PENNSYLVANIA MANUAL.

MR. PRESIDENT:

New Sweden's History Ignored

May I take a few minutes of the Senate's time to express some clear and definite thoughts on the resolutions introduced by Senator Stiefel and myself, calling for the insertion in the Pennsylvania Manual of a chapter on the first settlements, the first courts and the first state house in Pennsylvania—in other words, a short chapter on the history of New Sweden, founded here on Pennsylvania soil before William Penn was born?

This subject, like all other matters relating to early Pennsylvania history, is very dear to my heart. Naturally so. My ancestral roots run back in Pennsylvania soil to New Sweden and to a time twenty-eight years before William Penn set foot upon the shores of the Delaware; and in my veins runs the blood of every racial stock that contributed to the making of Pennsylvania.

The Colony of New Sweden was conceived in the fertile mind of the most illustrious king that Sweden ever had—Gustavus Adolphus—who, as early as 1624, planned to establish on the shores of the Delaware a Swedish colony in which the laborer should enjoy the fruit of his toils and which should be an asylum for the persecuted of all Christendom. At that time the awful Thirty Years War was raging in Europe, and so amid its fire and blood and desolation and devastation the great king dreamed this noble dream, planned this noble plan, which, in the providence of Almighty God he was not destined to carry into execution, as he laid down his life on one of the battlefields of the Germanies in 1632.

His daughter, Christina, who succeeded to the Swedish throne, carried out the plans of her illustrious father, and in the autumn of 1637 sent two ships, the Kalmar Nyckel and the Fogel Grip, carrying Swedes and Finns to the western world. These ships arrived on the banks of the Delaware in the early part of April 1638, and thus the Colony of New Sweden was founded.

First State House in Pennsylvania

Here on Pennsylvania soil this ignored and forgotten colony made the first settlements in the Keystone State, and the able Swedish Governor, Johan Printz, one of the most admirable characters in early American history, established the first permanent seat of government in Pennsylvania, erecting, before William Penn was born, a state house that stood for one hundred and sixty years.

Excellencies Plead With Angel Voices

The Colony of New Sweden had many excellencies which, in the language of Shakespeare, "plead like angels, trumpet tongued, against the deep damnation" of ignoring the high spots of the history of this Colony in any history text used in the public schools of the great Keystone State.

I do not have time to enumerate all of these excellencies but let me call your attention to three of them as follows:

(1) There was no slavery in the Colony of New Sweden. Hence it is not strange that at a later day there was issued in Pennsylvania the first protest against slavery on the American continent, although many so-called educated Pennsylvanians seem to think that the agitation against slavery began in New England among the templed hills of the Puritans.

(2) In the Colony of New Sweden was established the first Indian policy in Pennsylvania—a policy of treating the Indian like a human being instead of like a wild beast, a policy of purchasing land from the Indian, and not taking it from the aborigines by trickery, intimidation and force. This was the same Indian policy for which William Penn became renowned at a later day. I do not intend to be understood as attempting to detract one iota from the fame and renown of William Penn in the eternal pages of history; but the great truth of history is that the same Indian policy that he followed and for which he was famed, was established here in Pennsylvania by the Swedes before the great Quaker was born.

Principle of Religious Liberty

(3) But the third and greatest excellency of the Colony of New Sweden—an excellency that pleads with angel voice against the infamy of ignoring the high spots of its history in the textbooks used in Pennsylvania schools—is the fact that the Swedes planted in this colony the precious principle of religious liberty. You will note that I say "principle of religious liberty," for full religious liberty as it exists in the United States of America in 1937, did not exist anywhere as early as 1638.

I reiterate that the Swedes planted this precious principle in this colony on Pennsylvania soil, in a place where, in the providence of Almighty God, it was not strangled to death as it was in many other places in early America, but enjoyed an uninterrupted growth from the time of its planting.

This principle, I repeat, flourished on Pennsylvania soil before William Penn was born. By the time the great Quaker was ten years old, there had been eleven expeditions from the homeland to New Sweden; and when he came sailing up the majestic Delaware to found his province, he passed five Swedish Lutheran Churches on the way—a God fearing population that had all the virtues of the Puritans without their bigotry and intolerance.

William Penn gave this principle of religious liberty, planted here before he was born, such a majestic impetus that Pennsylvania soon became an asylum for the persecuted of every sect and of every creed. Wave upon wave of English immigration, of Irish immigration, of Scotch-Irish immigration, of German immigration, of French Huguenot immigration, of Welsh immigration, broke upon the shores of the Delaware.

Religious liberty was the magnet that drew these racial stocks with their different creeds to Pennsylvania, thanks to the Swedes and William Penn.

I do not mean to say that Pennsylvania was the only place where the principle of religious liberty was planted in early America. There was a great deal of religious liberty in the Colony of Rhode Island, founded by Roger Williams after he had denounced the theocratic form of government of the Puritans, after he had denounced their doctrine of the union of church and state and was thrown out because his ideas were in advance of theirs.

Thanks be to God, the principle of religious liberty was not strangled to death in Rhode Island. It flourished there from the beginning; but Rhode Island was small. There was not a large migration from that Colony carrying this principle into the rapidly developing country as there was from Pennsylvania.

There was considerable religious liberty in New Jersey, founded along liberal lines by English Quakers, but this principle met an unhappy fate at the hands of those of Puritan sentiments. There was a great deal of religious liberty in Maryland, founded by the great English Catholic, Lord Baltimore; but the same thing happened in Maryland that happened in New Jersey, at the hands of those of Puritan sentiments. In other words, the noble plan of Lord Baltimore was wrecked. Alas for his noble dreams!

Then, as time went on the established church of England was set up in many of the Colonies.

Pennsylvania's Grand Contribution

In order that you may see how largely religious liberty in the United States came out of Pennsylvania, let me call your attention to the fact that at as late a date as the close of the Revolutionary War, there were only three of the thirteen states that did not abridge religious liberty to the extent of having a state church. One of the three was little Rhode Island where the principle of religious liberty was planted at the beginning and was not strangled to death. A second was little Delaware; but keep in mind that little Delaware, up until the Revolutionary War, was part of Pennsylvania. The third was great, big Pennsylvania.

Keep in mind, also, that at as late a date as the time of the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, there were still five of the thirteen states that abridged religious liberty to the extent of having a state church. I think you will agree with me that the Constitution of the United States does not forbid the States to establish state churches if they see fit.

But this principle of religious liberty, planted in Pennsylvania by the Swedes and given a majestic impetus by William Penn, was working all the time; and so it was not long after the adoption of the Constitution of the United States until all of the States got rid of their state churches except one—Massachusetts. It took Massachusetts, cradle of religious bigotry and intolerance in America, more than a generation after the adoption of the Constitution of the United States to get rid of its state church.

Keep the above facts of American history in mind and then you can see how largely this most beautiful jewel in America's crown, this most precious gem in America's diadem of beauty, religious liberty, is a Pennsylvania contribution having its source in the, until now, ignored and forgotten Colony of New Sweden.

NOTE: Those interested further may refer to Dr. Amandus Johnson, *The Swedish Settlements on the Delaware*, (2 vols., Swedish Colonial Society, 1911); Henry D. Paxon, *Where Pennsylvania History Began*, (Swedish Colonial Society, 1926); Israel Acrelius, *A History of New Sweden*, (translation by Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1876.)

